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ABSTRACT

For junior colleges that cannot support a full-time public-relations director, the author suggests a program using the resources at hand. A flow chart must be made so that the faculty or administration member handling the program knows where to collect his information. (If possible, he should receive released time or extra pay.) Faculty members should be willing to help by providing information or making public appearances, for, if the taxpayers have a favorable image of the college, they will vote the necessary funds. Students can contribute by serving as liaison with high school students and teachers. They can talk to their friends and address club meetings and assemblies. On campus, they can guide visitors, act as aides at ceremonies, gather news from college clubs or from their parents' clubs or businesses. The community-relations director should also visit or write to school superintendents, principals, club directors, counselors, and high school faculty, offering student or faculty speakers, help with in-service training, and the like. He should also offer the services of a faculty speaker's bureau to chambers of commerce, service clubs, etc., and should let radio and TV stations know that the college can fill certain slots with discussion or information programs. As a last step, he should maintain a mailing list for regular news releases to the board of trustees, state education committees, school boards, legislators, and all the local news media--newspapers, radio, and TV. (HH)

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"COMMUNITY RELATIONS: A PRACTICAL APPROACH"

by Ronald J. Horvath

A re-statement of the VISTA slogan might provide a theme around which this presentation, "Community Relations: A Practical Approach," might revolve. VISTA challenges onlookers with, "If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem."

Although this antipodal approach might be overstated, the communication gap can be attacked from a problem-solution point of view. We can, perhaps, measure the degree to which all members of the college family are, or are not, willing to become part of either the problem or the solution.

Stating a few basic assumptions concerning community relations is vital in this introduction:

1. External communication is vital if our community/junior colleges are to achieve the viability of which they are capable.

2. Because practically all junior/community colleges rely on external sources for funding, keeping these external sources informed is both necessary and expected.

3. Positive community relations can be established if someone is willing to expend time and energy in laying out avenues of communication and then keeping those avenues filled with information.

These three assumptions, then, must underlie this presentation if we are to outline a stop-gap program to enhance our image and prestige and to repay partially the debt we owe to our sponsors.

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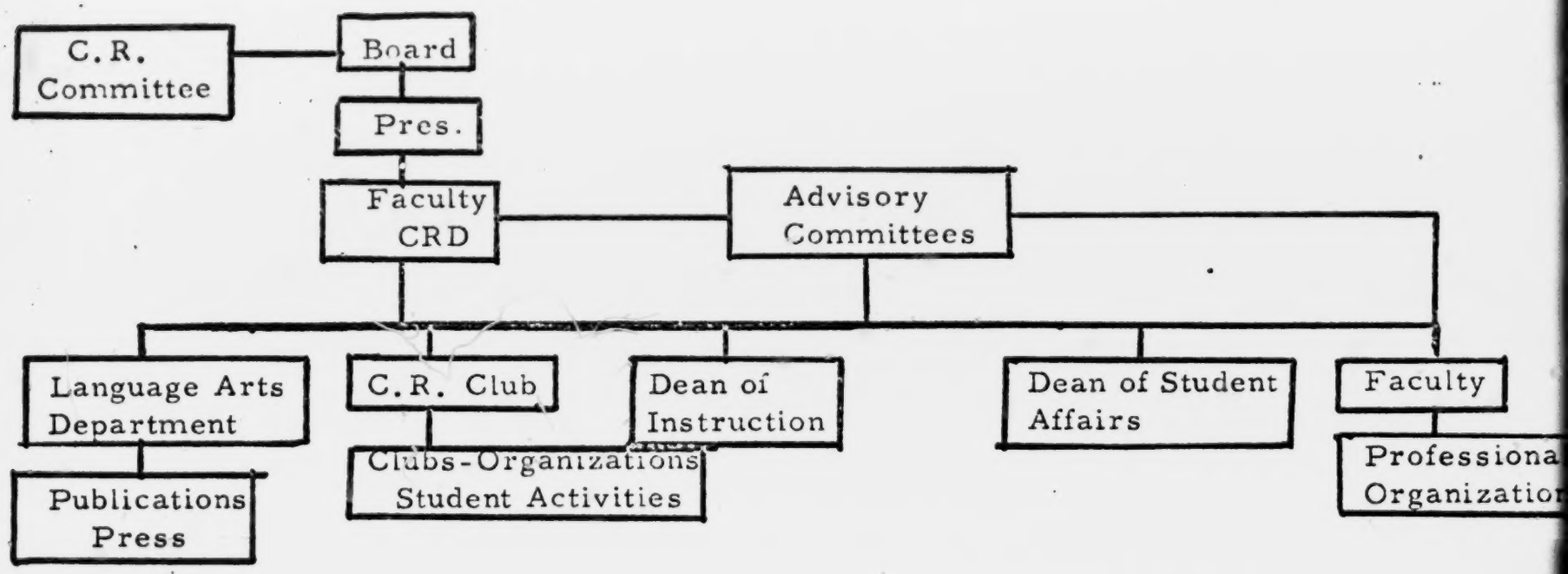
Most colleges have a framework which outlines how a community relations program will operate--duties and responsibilities of the community relations officer, the importance of the function being performed, and the liaison which he is to establish between the community college and the community at large. If your institution does not have a plan, here is a suggested stop-gap measure (Step 1):



Although this is only an organizational chart, it is a necessary tool if the college family is to understand its separate and shared responsibilities. The Community Relations Director must have access to information before he can disseminate it. The flow chart provides the plan for amassing information.

Realistically, few community/junior colleges have financial resources to support a full-time public relations or community relations director. Most colleges in a developmental or adolescent stage use a faculty member or administrative officer to handle the CR in addition to his other full-time duties. If either you or your college fits into this category, then these suggestions are aimed at you specifically.

In selecting an individual to act as CR director, locate a person with one fundamental characteristic--a dedication to the college and a belief in the mission of the institution. In effect, he is one who would rather be a solver of the problem than part of the problem itself. If he has a talent for writing, if he is granted a reduction of other duties, or if he is reimbursed for his effort--excellent. If he does not receive any or all of these three considerations, he must, as mentioned previously, be dedicated to the institution or, as Ernest Hemingway would phrase it, an "aficionado." He is Step 2 in the solution. With a concerned director already chosen, Step 3 of the solution involves the faculty and the students.

Contrary to popular opinion, Boards of Trustees do not invest individuals with <u>power</u>. These august bodies invest only with <u>office</u>; the power that individuals within the college amass is drawn from the <u>faculty</u> and <u>students</u>. The CRD can solicit aid from faculty members by pointing out to them that most faculty complaints have their origin in economics. If a favorable picture of the institution can be presented to those who are outside the college--in effect, those who have their fingers on the college purse strings--positive results can be obtained, or, at the very least, distorted views of the institution can be corrected. In essence, appeal to the faculty where it is most sensitive--in the wallet. This appeal can best be handled in informal conversation. A formal presentation at a faculty meeting can meet with resistance; a letter or memo is often unread. This personal contact is necessary and helpful. The faculty can and should provide the information; the CRD should disseminate it.

Students can be the turning point of any successful CR venture. They are the very best salesmen that the college has. A pool where all these latent resources can be accumulated, amassed, and unleashed is all that is needed. Get them involved in solutions to the college's problems. As a fourth step, form a community relations club or committee; outline your program to the group; solicit student help. If we are to believe what the media tell us--that the students want to be involved, that they want a part in the operations of a school, that they want to be heard--then we can provide a vehicle by which they can contribute positively and meaningfully to the institution. Believe me, students don't want to be a part of the problem; they want desperately to be a part of the solution. Make the students <u>a part of</u>, do not keep them <u>apart from</u>!

What in particular can the students do to help in CR? Specifically, let me mention these areas: first, they can serve as liaisons between the college and their high schools. Each student has his own favorite teacher in high school--someone who has helped him, someone with whom he communicates at least occasionally. This one contact in a local high school can be the starting point for a series of chain reactions--visits, talks, working relationships, etc. Let students go out and speak to their high school friends, let them address club meetings, assemblies and classes. We talk about peer group power, let's use it! You provide the machinery (Step 5); encourage the students to do the leg work.

How does the community relations director provide that machinery? One way is to visit the Superintendents of Schools in the area, the principals, the club directors, the guidance counselors, and the faculty

members in the high schools. Indicate that the college is willing to send either student or faculty representatives to help in any way that the high school would so desire. If the district needs help in planning an in-service training program, the college can help. If the school club program needs a speaker for an occasion, the students are willing. These are some ways that the CRD can provide the machinery.

If a personal visit is impossible, perhaps a letter similar to this sample might do the job:

Dear Sir:

Lehigh County Community College would like to offer its services to your activities' program.

The college will furnish upon request, speakers for club meetings, assemblies, or guidance programs. Speakers will be drawn from administration, faculty, and the student body.

Some areas in which the college can offer assistance are:

TECHNICAL-VOCATIONAL

Nursing
Chemistry
Electronics
Data Processing
Food Service
Mechanical Tech.
Secreterial Science
Apparel Manufacturing
Business Management
Police Science

ACADEMIC AREAS

Social Science
Language Arts
Business
Mathematics
Science

STUDENT PERSONNEL

Guidance
Testing
Admissions

GENERAL

Community College
Philosophy - Aims
and Objectives

Requests for aides can be addressed to:

Ronald J. Horvath
Community Relations Officer
Lehigh County Community College
Schnecksville, Pennsylvania

Thank you for your cooperation and do not hesitate to call upon the college.

Sincerely yours,

Ronald J. Horvath

Mail the letter to all school officials--superintendents, principals, counselors, club advisers, and faculty. Even if a request is never made, at the very least, your community knows that the college is willing to be of assistance, that the institution is cognizant of the needs of the schools, and that the college does not exist in a vacuum. Other areas in which the student-based Community Relations Committee can be helpful are:

1. Tour guide service for all visitors to the campus.
2. Aides for formal ceremonies such as open house, cornerstone setting, or building dedication.
3. News gatherers from other clubs and organizations within the college.
4. Ties with businesses and industries where the students' parents might work, or clubs and organizations to which the students' parents might belong.

If you haven't tapped student power, give it a try! The CR director should direct; the students are, and should be, the problem solvers.

Let me turn to another step (number 6) of practical community relations; personal contact with advisory committees, chambers of commerce,

service clubs, and important citizens. Organizing a speaker's bureau from within the faculty, publishing a list of speakers and their topics, sending out brochures, and setting up speaking dates are really ideals. Getting faculty members to commit themselves voluntarily to a topic is most difficult.

Unexplainably, most faculty members do not see themselves as public speakers. My recommendation is that you make contacts with those groups who utilize speakers and make a commitment for a date and a speaker--then go after the faculty members you know will represent the college. Only a few will turn you down once you have made the commitment. Not everyone will be accommodating, but those who volunteer are willing to be a part of the solution and not the problem. Again, make the speaking commitment, then seek out the talent.

Step 7 might involve contacting your local radio and television stations to offer your services and the services of the college to fill any time slots on a regular basis. We have a seven minute Sunday evening radio program donated by WSAN entitled "Community Education: The Vantage Point." The program features a different facet of the college every week. A student who worked at the station provided the contact through which the college received free air time. A student from the Community Relations Committee is the moderator.

The last practical suggestion I would like put forth involves mailing lists and news releases. All else aside, a regularly received stuffed envelope from the college says one thing to the recipient--things are happening at your school; why not read me and become informed? The

mailing might include the following:

1. The faculty and staff of the college.
2. The college Board of Trustees.
3. The Board of Governors, education committee, or the entire membership of the local chamber of commerce.
4. School boards in the area.
5. District, state and national senators and representatives.
6. All newspapers in the area, whether they be a daily, weekly or monthly.
7. All radio and television stations.

Do not decide what is newsworthy and what is not. Allow these outside sources to make the decisions. You send the material. Demonstrate visually to these groups that the college, itself, is willing to be a partner to solutions. Do not permit your institution to sit on its academic haunches and be a STRUCT--E. Because what is missing from that word is exactly the combination that can help the college, the community, the state, and the nation solve its problems.

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CLEARINGHOUSE FOR
JUNIOR COLLEGE
INFORMATION